

The Cry That Is Going Up From the Farms

—The Cause and a Remedy

By HAROLD T. CHASE

THAT there is disquietude among farmers is attested by 40,000 letters written to Assistant Postmaster-General Blakslee. That the average farmer does not know exactly where he stands financially—as to profit and loss in his business—is also shown by the letters. Mr. Chase suggests that the farmer be helped to a right start with a survey of the business that will let him and the public know the cost of food production.

"DISQUIETING and portentous" is the description Asst. Postmaster-General Blakslee gives of the responses of farmers to a questionnaire sent out by his department to 200,000 in all parts of the land. To February first more than 40,000 replies had been received and since the middle of December they have been coming in at the rate of 1,000 a day.

Only those who know of the difficulty to the average farmer of "taking his pen in hand," the reluctance to write letters, appreciate fully what an interest 40,000 replies in a short time, with other thousands now steadily rolling in, signify.

Deep unrest is reported among farmers, and by the farmers, the major complaints being, in numerical order, as follows:

Inability to obtain labor to work the farms;
High profits of middlemen for the mere handling of food products;

Lack of proper agencies of contact between the farmer and the ultimate consumer.

Mr. Blakslee's opinion that the situation is grave was stated to a Senate committee after a member of the committee had given voice to the mechanical remark that the replies "seemed to come mostly from a bunch of Bolsheviks."

In fact they came from a class to which the complaining and cynical Senator perhaps does not belong—workers.

The voices of the farmers are heard in loud protest, indicating that the country has arrived at a stage in its development when an audit of its first industry, agriculture, is a necessity, preliminary to a nearer approach to the solution of the problems of the farm, the land and food supply.

Among these responses a New York farmer thinks that "labor unions are more responsible for high prices than anyone else. People are trying to get pay for what they do not earn."

According to a Missouri farmer:

"I fear almost a famine. Farm help everywhere is flocking to the city, lured by short hours, high wages and a good time. Someone, I fear, is going to suffer if this condition is not remedied shortly."

Another Missouri producer, protesting against the high pay to middlemen, wrote: "I sell butter to the dealer for 45 cents a pound, and the same butter sells to the consumer for 80 cents. Such conditions are causing the farmers to leave the farm by the thousands."

The same farmer suggested, as a solution of the middleman problem, that "it be arranged for them to go on the farm and help produce things."

The Cost of Keeping a Horse

ONE of the most successful and largest ranchmen in Kansas, when informed by the State Board of Agriculture the other day that it costs \$157 to keep a horse a year in that state, expressed his astonishment and immediately remarked: "I am going home and sell eight of my horses."

All the farmers complain of the high wages that lures their help to the cities. And if the farm worker is going to the city, maybe it will be a solution for the middlemen to try their hand on the farm.

"All of the young men in this vicinity of any account," writes another farmer, "go to the city, and there are only a few old men left to farm."

He attributes the trouble to "the good times in the cities."

Declaring (the old complaint, and with much force in it) that while the farmer has to take what the commission man and retailer will pay him for his product, he is compelled to pay whatever the dealer asks for his clothes, farm machinery and other necessities, another farmer writes:

"Farmers work from 12 to 16 hours a day. City labor works from 6 to 8 hours a day. The city man makes two or three times as much as the farmer. The farmer labors and produces, but gets a smaller return than any other class."

This last is the oldest and commonest grievance of the farmer. Why should other men's work be so much more valued than his? Do these other classes render a greater service to the community? The farmer can not see it.

Another letter notes that "the price of everything the farmer has to buy is still going up and the quantity we can raise and put on the market is steadily going down. I am a small farmer and do not know much else. We are all loyal citizens, but there is an awful uneasiness."

To one able to read between lines the above is illuminating and very human. The writer is modest, he has a sense of humility in the presence of a complex problem, and he wants to be fair and to think and do what is right. He says, "we are all loyal citizens."

He is for the government. There is a vast deal of this, coming up from the four million farms, a chorus of voices, not all in tune, not clearly articulate, a chorus of agreement, however, in the belief that "something is wrong."

At the close of the sessions of the New York State Grange, at Rochester, A. M. Loomis, secretary of the Washington office of the National Grange, said:

"The people of Rochester are no different from the people of the other cities of the United States in their failure to appreciate and understand in any large measure either the actual conditions in the country, or the actual conditions in the farmers' organizations of the United States."

Turn from these complaints, the sincerity of which is manifest in the very monotonous uniformity of them, to counter-complaints against the farmer. He is accused of profiteering, the true cause and original source of the bitterly attested high cost of living.

But those who draw this indictment against the farmer do not know what the cost of production is on the farm. The farmer does not know.

It is this lack of clear knowledge that causes the protests from the great farmer organizations to be so nebulous and vague. They do not comprise definite remedies, but cry out against misconceptions and misrepresentations and misunderstandings, in Tennyson's words, "And with no language but a cry."

The fact regarding this primal industry of the land is that it is and always has been conducted, "on a shoe-string." It is the sole remaining industry that is still outside the pale of modern, ordered, scientific business. Scientific it may be, here and there, so far as methods of production are concerned, but as a business it is primitive and unorganized. It has no books, no book-keeper, no balance sheet, no audit, and makes no reports to its owners, or, what has become almost equally vital, to the public.

How, in the absence of the fiscal and accounting machinery in use in other industries, has the farm kept out of insolvency? It is not a far-fetched statement indeed that thousands of farms are and always have been tottering on the edge of insolvency.

The farmers have maintained themselves by a low standard of living and by the rising price of land. Men have kept agriculture going by accepting for themselves, their wives and children, a lower standard of living than obtains in cities. They have economized in every direction, in clothing and dress, in social diversions and enjoyment of life, in cultivation of taste by travel and clubs. For the deprivations of the rural community life there should be a compensating high profit financially; but the profit has been not higher but lower than in the organized industries.

But the farmer has been held on the land because he has seen his land steadily rising in price, or by leaps and bounds. Land has advanced, not because of the profitability of farming, but because of the steady diminution of available, unoccupied, productive land in a time when population has steadily increased.

Nothing will silence the debate about farm prices and farm living except a business survey and audit showing a balance sheet of cost and conditions. Nothing else indeed will enable the farmer himself to know just what it is that is unsatisfactory, the "something" that is "wrong."

If such a survey is made, as sometime it must be, either by the sample of a whole typical state, or of selected and typical farms representing important branches of agriculture, as wheat, corn, cotton, wool, cattle, swine, etc., the nation will be startled to learn the true cost of production of its food, of which it is ignorant today. It will learn that while other industries show at the end of the year, if they are solvent, sufficient earnings to maintain upkeep in an ample way, to add to the surplus fund for hard times and unforeseen

contingencies, to provide for depreciation, to supply large working capital, in addition to disbursements in dividends, the farm shows no such earnings, but the farm industry has lived from hand to mouth.

The balance sheets of all our important industrial corporations show that every such corporation that has any claim to solvency has in the last three years, in anticipation of rising costs of conducting business, vastly increased its profit and loss surplus and working capital. The corporation or firm is the exception that in the last five years has not doubled its working capital. As we all very well know, most of our great industrial corporations have increased surplus and working capital very much more than that. But the average farm today, as five years ago, is doing business "on a shoe-string."

Nation Would Be for Adequate Remuneration

THERE is good reason to suspect that basic food prices have always been too low. It requires only that this fact should be known, as only an adequate survey can make it known, to bring instantly to the farmer the interested and sympathetic support of the government and the nation, with the desire to relieve his situation by sane and intelligent action.

The farmer has never been treated seriously in American politics. His political potentiality has been recognized, to be sure, and he has been verbally coddled, sops of appropriations have been thrown to him, and in respect to agricultural education and experiment something specific and real has been accomplished. But in the main and as the rule he has been patted on the back but never has been seriously conferred with.

Congress and politics have flattered and cajoled, their attitude and that of the country patronizing, and their interest casual and superficial. The farmer has known all this and resented it. And it is true that today in all the literature from the farm, in the complaints and the letters of protest, the grievance is not clearly stated. The farmer himself must remain largely inarticulate so long as his condition is not known to himself as the condition of a well organized business.

This somewhat helpless attitude of the average farmer is well indicated by the remark quoted above of a mid-western farmer: "We are all loyal citizens, but there is an awful uneasiness." That is manifestly the sincere statement of a well meaning man in a maze and confusion of intricate economic surroundings which he can not analyze or define, through which he has no clue to find his way. Such a clue must be provided in a farm survey by accountants competent for the job, whose name, known to the country, will be a guaranty of the correctness of the facts reported.

Discussion, in a word, of farm prices, of the farmer's condition, loses nine-tenths of all its force because of an acknowledged lack of concrete, authentic data showing what the underlying facts of his situation are.

A farm survey is capable of being made much as some years ago railroad shop surveys were made and similar surveys of industrial plants, at a time when there was much discussion of inefficiency and wastes. Just how such an undertaking should be gone about is a matter for the consideration of the associations, organizations and institutions interested, such as agricultural colleges, experiment stations, granges, farm bureaus, agricultural societies and boards, or legislatures and Congress itself. Typical farm counties could be selected representative of different branches of agricultural production and an intensive survey made. The detail of such a survey of agriculture to obtain the fundamental facts now unknown and to set farm accounting on its feet is not a difficult matter. The question is whether the organizations interested consider the matter sufficiently vital and feasible, so that the project will be undertaken.

A Splendid Gift to Baptists



The Montezuma Baptist University.

THE people of the little western town of Las Vegas, N. M., have made a gift to the New Mexico Baptist Convention of property worth about half a million dollars for the establishment of a university. Since Las Vegas only numbers around seven thousand in her population she feels rather big. The picture shows the main building in the gift, a handsome brownstone structure of superior interior finish, once a popular and fashionable resort owned by the Santa Fe railroad.

It is odd to note that the same big casino, comparable to those of the French Riviera, where once gambling tables, revelry, drinking and dancing were the order of the day (and night), will this September witness the gathering of leading Baptist educators to open what is hoped will become a national Baptist university for general coeducation.

Aside from the building shown in the photo, the property comprises a dozen or more other buildings of moderate size, a power house, a million and a half gallon water reservoir, a forty acre irrigated farm, eight hundred acres of pasture and woodland, and a group of the finest hot springs outside of Arkansas.